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ABSTRACT

Although Florida's community colleges have consistently been the primary access to college and post-secondary education for state residents and are uniquely suited to help dependent individuals gain the skills necessary to become self-sufficient, state funding to the colleges has consistently been reduced. Income per student from the state has been reduced from 50% more to 22% less than that provided to public K through 12 schools, and the passage of Proposition 2 severely restricts spending by the 1995 legislature. This threatens the colleges' ability to carry out their mission, but cost of supporting dependent individuals is high. In Dade County, for example, one in six residents were living in poverty as of the 1990 census, while the County's 1993 expenditures for food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent Children alone amounted to $479,706,672. Moreover, a correlation can be drawn between a person's level of education and the likelihood of engaging in crime (the cost of maintaining Florida's 44,000 prisoners is $1 billion over the term of their incarceration). Education is even more important in the Information Age, but statewide 54% of students entering community colleges test as academically underprepared. The state's community colleges provide an essential bridge to independence for residents, leading to further educational opportunities, employment, and higher salaries. Although the colleges represent a bargain compared to the costs of maintaining dependent residents, the state has abandoned its commitment to the colleges and is, in effect, starving the solution to Florida's most serious problems. (BCY)

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Starving the Solution

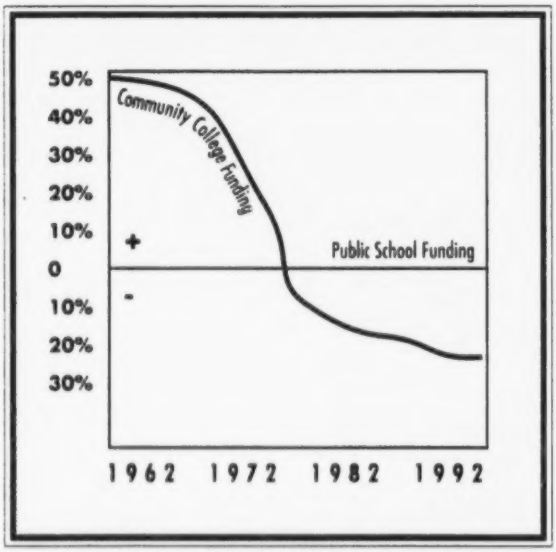
by Robert H. McCabe

The growing underclass of individuals who are dependent on society is threatening the well-being of all Floridians. Our state is becoming overwhelmed by the cost of sustaining this dependency. The number of persons receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) has been rising at a rate of 20% a year since 1988. The state's Medicaid expenditure skyrocketed to almost two billion dollars by 1990 and over $4.1 billion by 1993. This was equal to the state general revenue budget in 1980-81. Expenditures on prison and law enforcement are escalating exponentially; in Dade County alone, nearly one quarter of our citizens are receiving public assistance—in housing, health care, or food stamps.

Florida has exceptional prospects for a bright economic future as the business connector to the emerging nations of the Caribbean and Central and South America. However, the loss of our human resources, because of lack of skills, and the cost of sustaining growing numbers of individuals in a dependent status, threatens to destroy that potential.

Florida's productive and efficient community colleges have been the primary access to college and post-secondary education for our residents. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to help dependent individuals gain the skills to become self-sufficient, thus providing business and industry with a much needed quality work force and saving Floridians literally billions of dollars. Despite the community colleges' excellent record of performance, the state has consistently reduced the resources that are provided to the community colleges to support essential services to our communities. Over the history of the community college system, the income per student has been reduced from 50% more to 22% less than that provided for public schools, grades K through 12. In 1994-95, community colleges received just over half as much per lower division student as the state universities.

The current level of funding for community colleges threatens their capacity to carry out their mission—Florida is, in effect, starving the most promising solution to the problem of reducing the number of dependent individuals by denying the colleges the resources they need to help these individuals gain the skills they need to be productively employed.



Source: Miami-Dade Community College, District Administration Newsletter, November, 1994

Community college funding per full-time student as a percentage of public school funding.

Supporting dependency has high costs and high risks to society as a whole.

The top school disciplinary problems in the nation have taken a drastic turn since the 1940s.

1940	1990
Talking out of turn	Drug Abuse
Chewing Gum	Alcohol Abuse
Making Noise	Pregnancy
Running in the Halls	Suicide
Cutting in Line	Rape
Dress-Code Violations	Robbery
Littering	Assault

Source: The Florida Council of 100, Committee on the Justice System, November, 1994

There are individuals in our own neighborhoods, in this land of plenty, who live in terrible circumstances. The growth of America's underclass—fueled by increasing poverty, drugs, unemployment, and breakdown in family life—is causing our social structure to crumble. Values we once held in high esteem are no longer relevant to our daily life which is plagued by crime, violence, and disregard for basic rights. Our underpinnings of honor and duty—our good citizenship—seems to be meaningless to increasing numbers of our young people. The change in values and attitudes is vividly shown in a comparison of problems in schools, as reported by high school faculty, shown above.

"Poverty costs the society its sense of well-being and its human resources."

All Americans are deeply concerned about the escalation of mindless violence and increasing numbers of incarcerations. In 1994, for the first time, there are over one million Americans incarcerated—the highest rate of any country other than Russia. Most Americans perceive that life has become fraught with danger.

A tour of Miami neighborhoods shows more and more blocked roads and gated complexes as we try to wall ourselves from the problems that surround us. The sight of homeless persons begging on our streets has become common, and their cardboard homes disgrace us all. Our poor communities are breeding grounds for disease, crime, and drugs, all of which directly impact all of our lives.

In Florida, the rate for all crimes has been steadily climbing since 1989. The Florida Council of 100's Committee on the Justice System filed a draft report that showed the impact of crime on Florida businesses, which were victims of more than 136,000 reported crimes resulting in $7.5 billion in losses.

There are wide-spread initiatives to increase federal allocations to fight crime, such as the $30 billion Federal anti-crime bill. But, according to Alfred Blumstein, former president of the American Society of Criminology, "Starting in the next year (1995) or beyond, demographics will start to work against us as the number in the high-crime age group increases."[1] The high-crime age group to which he refers are from 15 to 19 years old.

James Alan Fox, dean of the College of Criminal Justice at Northwestern University, was even more blunt: "To prevent a blood bath in the year 2005, when we will have a flood of 15-year-olds, we have to do something today with the 5-year-olds. But when push comes to shove, prevention programs often fall by the wayside in favor of increased incarceration."[2] The problem in Florida is dramatically shown in a report of the Southern Regional Education Board showing Florida as the only state in the Southern Region that is below national average on all ten criteria concerning the status of children.

Unfortunately, our society has become more and more reactive instead of seeking ways to deal with the most basic root cause of crime—poverty. In Dade County alone, almost one-third of our 143 neighborhoods are considered "high poverty" areas. In Florida, 41% of black males between 18 and 32 are under the control of the courts. This is an overwhelming loss to the community.

There are many portraits of poverty—hungry and abused children, homeless families, young people with no hope for a productive future. Unbearable living conditions create enormous emotional and economical pressures that explode in outrageous acts of violence. The recent riots in Los Angeles, and those in Miami in 1980, make it very clear that the problems of the underclass impact all of us.

The costs of poverty are more than monetary. Poverty is the leading cause of shortened life expectancy in America. Poverty costs the society its sense of well-being and its human resources.

Alexander Jennings

Alexander Jennings, winner of the academic award for Independent Studies at the Miami-Dade Community College Kendall campus, started as a homeless veteran. Born and raised in Miami's poor, predominantly black neighborhood of Overtown, Mr. Jennings was a ninth-grade dropout, who joined the military, became a substance abuser, and ended up in the VA hospital with a heart attack. He decided to change his life and from that moment his path led up, out of dependency. He obtained a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, equivalent to a high school diploma, and entered Miami-Dade's Veterans Upward Bound program. After completing a one-year training course in drug counseling from the University of Miami, Jennings became a permanent employee in their drug counseling program. He is now a social work major at Barry University, is married, and is raising three children.

The cost of maintaining a state of dependency is astronomical.

The billions spent on national public assistance, paid for by American taxpayers, are almost impossible to comprehend. In Dade County, while the dollar figures are more understandable, they are as alarming.

The 1990 Census reported that there were 341,216 persons, one of each six residents of Dade County, living in poverty. In the once healthy and now poverty-stricken neighborhood of Overtown, the cost to sustain life for a family was $22,348, of which $12,665 was provided by the public sector. Considering that there were 3,439 households in Overtown, that meant that the total cost provided by the public sector to sustain life was $43,554,935.

The costs and the number of persons needing assistance have most certainly risen in the ensuing four years. Dade County's 1993 expenditures for just two programs—food stamps and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—totalled $479,706,672. Almost half a million persons, one-quarter of our county's population, received AFDC and/or food stamps.

When determining the cost of maintaining persons in a dependent condition, public housing is another important factor. Metro-Dade County's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reports that the total budgeted amount is

Service	Dade County
Human Services Administration	5,994,925
Hospitals	490,008,755
Other Health Service Facilities	48,268,706
Health	198,664,525
Childrens' Medical Services	11,103,990
Alcohol, Drugs, Mental Health	46,733,300
Health Insurance Benefits (disabled)	110,000,000
Health Insurance Benefits (aged)	1,040,000,000
Total Human Service	4,183,666,982

Source: Baseline Profile for Neighborhood Transformation, DEVPLAN, Inc., November, 1994

Over $4 billion was spent on Human Services in Dade County

$45,000,000 for the 12,000 units federally funded and managed by the Dade County HUD office, which estimates that 45,000 persons live in these HUD units. These figures do not include several other types of subsidized housing which are privately owned but leased and paid for by the federal government.

The Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services tells us that the average stay in public housing is 15 years; the average time food stamps and AFDC are received is two years. Even if children succeed in escaping from a life of poverty, they will be in the public health care system until they are out on their own; many people will stay in the system—the cost of which amounted to $215 million in Dade County for unreimbursed care in 1993—for their whole lives.

There are many services other than those for food and shelter that dramatically increase the real, total cost of dependency.

When we add in city and county services that cost far more in poverty-stricken areas, the total climbs. In terms of public expenditures that directly served people in 1990, almost $10 billion was spent by government (local, state, and national) in Dade County in 1990.

Annie-Lissette Sepulveda

In 1994, Dade County subtracted one person from their list of families needing Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Annie-Lissette Sepulveda, 30, found herself without work or job skills even though she was a graduate of Jose M. Lazaro high school in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. Her life consisted of waiting for her assistance check and caring for her three-year-old twins, Yesenia and Tamara. The neighborhood where she lived was dangerous, "...there are a lot of prostitutes and drug dealers." Ms. Sepulveda entered the Medical Assisting Program at Miami-Dade's Medical Center campus and, 15 months later, received a vocational certificate in medical assisting. She enrolled in the Private Industry Council's Project Independence, a program that provides meaningful job skills training to individuals with low incomes. Ms. Sepulveda says her success at Miami-Dade carries a message of hope for single mothers in similar situations.

Crime and educational deficiencies go hand in hand.

Direct correlations can be drawn between levels of education and careers in crime; the national data show that most persons in our prisons have less than a high school education. Consider this: most criminals begin their careers as juveniles, with an average of six juvenile offenses. They may have turned to crime for many reasons, but they have one commonality: they are a tremendous financial drain on the rest of society.

Career criminals in Dade County, profiled in a study by the Program Analysis and Grant Development Division of the Metro-Dade Department of Justice Assistance, impose a shocking aggregate dollar cost on our residents. The study showed continuous costs incurred by 1,800 violent career criminals—whose histories include rearrest, reprosecution, and reincarceration—including costs associated with case processing, screening by the state attorney, arraignment, and any type of pretrial hearing, averaged $141,319 per criminal.

According to the study, the total direct cost to the county for this "...revolving door that repeatedly allowed 1,800 violent offenders back into society..." was $254,374,200. John S. Farrell, Chief of the Criminal Investigations Division of the Metro-Dade Police Department: "The costs of incarcerating these predators are but a small fraction of the economic costs such individuals impose on our communities through the numerous crimes they commit each year."[5]

While the cost of maintaining our criminal justice system should be of great concern, we should be equally disturbed when we examine the lifetime patterns of the career criminals profiled in this study. Their mean age is only 24. On average, they had six prior juvenile convictions, then they committed misdemeanors, felonies, and violent felonies.

In Florida alone, which maintains around 44,000 prisoners, the cost is $1 billion over the term of their incarceration. The annual expenditure on prisoners is nearly ten

times the expenditure for a full-time student in a community college. These expenditures are having little effect on the rate of recividism; most released criminals are back in jail within three years.

Considering that the number of new prison admissions in Florida has almost tripled in eight years, rising from approximately 12,500 to 33,000, it is obvious that we are facing the frightening prospect of an ever-increasing burden on society and the loss of important human resources.

"Employment is the key to self-sufficiency, yet there are a disproportionate number of citizens who are completely unprepared to take their place in today's workforce."

Members of the Information Age workforce need a higher level of skills.

In the 21st century, the socially deprived, undereducated person will be at an even greater disadvantage. Business and industry leaders are expressing deep concerns about the need for workers with high quality skills at a post-secondary level. Persons with minimal skills, even though they are willing to work, will find there are fewer available jobs.

In the Information Age, the nature of jobs has changed significantly. Information skills are needed as the base for almost all employment. This is a significant change from a time when most jobs in America were based on a willingness to work and minimal skills.

Before and just after World War II, 80% of the jobs were for unskilled or semi-skilled workers; businesses were labor intensive; most employment was on farms or in factories and plants such as those of the giant steel and automotive industries. Those percentages have become almost directly reversed. Today, business and industry leaders tell us that only 20% of new jobs are for the unskilled or semi-skilled; 80% will require some post-secondary education.

George A. Baker, III and Lester W. Reed, Jr., authors of "Creating a World-Class Workforce," cut to the heart of the issue: "America's problems can in fact be traced to a prime cause—and a cure exists. The root cause, exacerbated by rapid growth in social and entitlement programs, is the inability of the U.S. economy to expand sufficiently to cover the cost of increased spending. At the core of the economic situation is a large, underprepared work force that cannot or often does not choose to effectively compete in today's economy. Particularly in the production of sophisticated products, an underprepared or unmotivated work force has no hope of meeting the challenges of the future ...Without a restructured educational process to create this workforce, all of our efforts to combat social ills are doomed to be losing battles."[4] Our businesses and industries must have a workforce of the highest quality in order to succeed in the world marketplace. We are already seeing a gross mismatch between the capabilities of individuals attempting to enter the job market and the needs of employers. The gap between the skills needed and those possessed by the workforce continues to grow, seriously handicapping American business and industry.

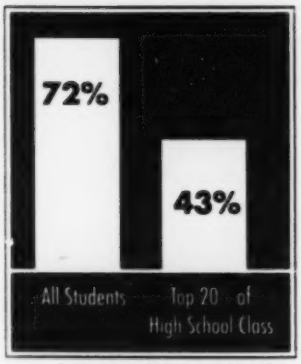
Floridians are Underskilled for the Information Age.

On a statewide basis, 54% of students entering Florida's community colleges test as academically underprepared. Currently at Miami-Dade Community College, 72% of entering high school graduates, and 43% of those from the top 20% of high school graduates, required remedial work just to be able to do basic entry-level college work.

Importantly, in a study by the College Board, there was a 90% overlap in the skills business and industry wanted in a beginning employee with those that colleges wanted in an entering student.

On a nationally standardized test, 41% of Dade tenth grade students were in the last quartile in reading. In addition, it is clear that the entering immigrant population adds even more underprepared students to Florida's schools.

In 1989, the U.S. Department of Education reported that Florida led the nation in high school dropouts. Young people who drop out of high school before graduation are virtually unemployable in any but the most menial jobs. According to the SERVE Report, "Florida and Georgia, for example, offer lots of jobs through tourism, which provides minimum wage and "working poor" positions for high school dropouts and well-paying jobs for college graduates in business, computer, financial, and professional services."



Source: Miami-Dade Community College, District Administration, Spring, 1994

At Miami-Dade Community College, nearly 3 of 4 entering students, and 4 of 10 from the high school top 20%, are academically deficient.

Higher education leads to higher pay.

The Florida Department of Commerce reported data from 1991-1992 U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Labor statistics, comparing Florida to the other 49 states. In average annual pay, at $21,991 Florida ranked well below the national average of $24,575. In average hourly earnings in manufacturing, Florida was sixth from the bottom of the scale, at $9.61 per hour.

There is a direct correlation between states with the highest percentage of educational attainment and those with the highest hourly wage, highest personal per capita income, and highest annual salary. When the national data are analyzed for average annual pay, we see that in seven of the top ten states, more than 60% of the wage earners have post-secondary education.

Average Annual Earnings In 1992 for:

High School Dropout:	$12,809
High School Graduate:	$18,737
Associate Degree:	$20,866
Bachelor's Degree:	$32,629
Advanced Degree:	$48,653

Estimated lifetime earnings by education levels:

High School Dropout:	$609,000
High School Graduate:	$821,000
Associate Degree:	$993,000
Bachelor's Degree:	$1,062,000
Master's Degree:	$1,619,000
Doctorate:	$2,142,000

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, July, 1994

A national study released in July by the U.S. Department of Commerce found that higher earnings are linked to higher levels of education

Education is the answer.

I believe that children undergo a gradual disillusionment. The freshness, the curiosity seen so often in young children, begins to disappear as they learn more of life's realities. By the time they are old enough to enter middle school, many young people—particularly those who are attempting to rise from poverty—have become completely defeated by a system they perceive as uncaring and unsupportive.

They despair of ever finding a way out. They are stuck in the bog of public assistance. Some will struggle in low-paying jobs and accept their fate while trying to maintain a sense of worth and pride. Others will decide to take what they want, regardless of the tenets of law and order. A fortunate few will get the encouragement and support they need to reach their goals.

The cards are stacked against the underprepared. A person who has dropped out of school, or even one with a high-school diploma, will not be equipped to enter the new workforce. But, community colleges have a record of helping the underprepared to attain success.

Erica Kochenower Bradleyson

Erica was a single mom with two kids, living on food stamps, AFDC, and student aid. While waiting for Pell Grant funds, she had to sell her houseplants for cash to buy groceries. After graduating with a 3.93 GPA from Florida Community College at Jacksonville, she became a nurse at University Hospital. Her new husband and thriving family are very proud of her success.

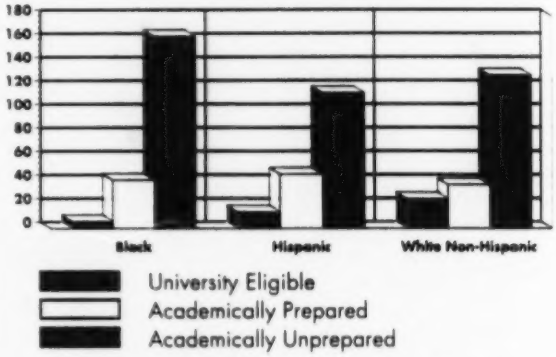
Community colleges are the bridge to independence.

Labor Secretary Robert Reich recently said it best, "Community colleges are the unsung heroes of the nation's middle class."[5]

Community colleges are the primary access for the essential postsecondary education that leads to jobs and self-sufficiency. For substantial numbers of Floridians, community colleges are the bridge to independence. Florida's community colleges have often been acknowledged as among the best in America. For most minorities, these institutions are the only opportunity to gain a post-secondary education and a better future. At Miami-Dade, for instance, we have the most Blacks, Hispanics, low-income, and English-As-a-Second-Language students of any college or university in the country. By the same token, we have been rated as the best at teaching and learning, the most innovative, and the number one community college in America.

As an example of what can be achieved when there is a serious commitment to help all individuals develop fully, Miami-Dade is the pro-

The majority of entering students are underprepared, yet they succeed in Miami-Dade Nursing Programs.



Source: Miami-Dade Community College, District Administration, Spring, 1994

"Community Colleges stand as the institutions with the greatest capability to immediately move significant numbers of Americans from dependent to self-sufficient status."

Larry Shyrock

Before losing his sight in 1988, Larry Shyrock, a 51-year-old Vietnam veteran who wore braces on his legs, was self-employed as a custom home improvement carpenter using skills that he had learned from his father and grandfather. Even though he had become totally blind, and even though he had only a ninth grade education, Larry wanted to pursue a college degree. The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation refused him services, saying his disabilities were too severe for him to attend school.

In 1990, with the help of Miami-Dade's Upward Bound program for veterans, he passed his college entry exams and, in 1991 he earned his GED. He earned an Associate of Arts degree in social work, received several awards for academic achievement, and became a member of Phi Theta Kappa, a national honor society. He earned a Bachelor of Liberal Studies degree at Barry University in 1993 and he's been accepted at Nova University for graduate study.

Today he has a home office equipped with a voice synthesizing computer and works as a computer processor and a behavioral therapy counselor. The community has gained the skills of this man, who otherwise would have been completely dependent on the society for his most basic needs.

"Community colleges are . . .a golden resource in this time of turbulent economic change."

ducer of most registered nurses in Dade County. In the past two years, the Medical Center Campus graduated just over 600 nurses. Two-thirds were minorities, only 6% of whom would have been eligible for state university admission; almost half were academically deficient in basic skills. One third of the graduates were white non-Hispanics, only 13% of whom would have been eligible for admission to the state universities; more than two-thirds were academically deficient. The graduates, after a two-year program, sit for the same state licensure examination as graduates of four-year university bachelor degree nursing programs.

At the most recent examination, 217 nurses from Miami-Dade took the test with 107 from the State University System. Of first-time candidates, 88% of Miami-Dade students passed as did 92% of students from the university baccalaureate programs. That is truly remarkable considering that less than 10% of the Miami-Dade graduates would have initially been admissible to the State University System.

Opening the doors to independence.

The Microcomputer Education for Employment of the Disabled (MEED) program established at Miami-Dade in 1989, is a special and unique training program. The program creates job opportunities for unemployed, severely physically disabled adults through practical training in business PC software. With easy access to a PC, persons with hearing impairments, visual impairments, or upper body disabilities are as competitive in business as any able-bodied person. Between 80% and 90% of MEED students graduate and become Microcomputer Specialists.

MEED has a strong, close partnership with the local business community through its Business Advisory Council. One hundred corporate executives participate in the council and are personally involved with student activities, financial and equipment contributions, field trips, evaluation of performance, internships, mentorships, employment opportunities, and classroom instruction. MEED has long been an exemplary model of partnership among the private sector, public agencies, and a community college. The MEED program at Miami-Dade has produced 120 graduates who have gained the opportunity to obtain satisfying jobs, financial independence, and upward mobility.

Miami-Dade was one of the first in the United States to be designated as a serviceman's opportunity college by the Defense Department and the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. In the mid-'70s, through Project AHEAD (Army Help for Education and Development), service personnel could pursue a continuous education while they were on duty at various locations.

By the end of the 1993 fiscal year, the Veterans' Upward Bound program at the Kendall Campus had served 480 veterans through its federal grant. Program counselors also worked with hundreds of local veterans, a significant number of whom were living on the streets, homeless—whether eligible for the program or not—on federal, state, and local sources of aid for education and job training.

Using the education they have received at Miami-Dade, thousands of citizens serve the community in very special ways. There are an abundance of persons who are gaining success and self-sufficiency every day.

Another group deserves special mention: the single parents who struggle to attain an education, sometimes against overwhelming odds. About 28% of Florida's children are raised by more than 700,000 single parents, a rate surpassed by only five other states. Florida's community colleges have provided childcare and other supportive programs to assist single parents, thus moving entire families to self-sufficiency.

Poverty-stricken single parents have an enormous task in simply providing sustenance for their children. Imagine the near impossibility of accessing a post-secondary education under those circumstances. Those who try and, to an even deeper extent, those who succeed, are truly American heroes and heroines.

Delores Bloom-Fisher

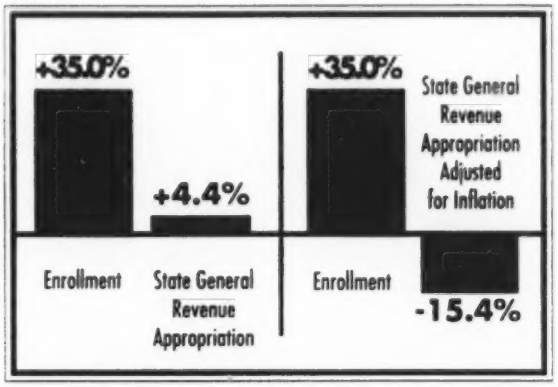
In 1989, Delores Bloom-Fisher, a single parent of two boys, started working at Mercy Hospital as a salad server in the food service department. Her supervisors encouraged her to enroll in the Dietetic Technology Program at Miami-Dade. Although it meant depending on public transportation, Delores traveled every day, weekends included, from Opa-Locka to work a full-time schedule at Mercy Hospital near downtown Miami, and arranged a class schedule which included evening courses. She also made time for her sons and often they did their homework together. She received her associate's degree and is now manager of purchasing and hot food production at the hospital. She is working toward a bachelor's degree.

Florida has abandoned its commitment to the community colleges.

From 1988 to 1993, Florida's general revenue and community colleges' enrollment increased by about the same percentage. But the state appropriation to education was much lower, and the community colleges' portion was minuscule. When the figures are corrected for inflation, state revenue was still up, but the community colleges' appropriation was down by more than 15%. This spread is even more startling when viewed on a per-student basis. When adjusted for inflation the decrease in the appropriation per student was 38%.

Florida's lottery funds were intended for quality enhancement but, in fact, they have been used to supplant general revenue. Even when these funds are added back into the mix, there is an appropriation decrease of 4.4% per student, which is a decrease of 22.6% when corrected for inflation.

When the education picture is looked at as a whole, it becomes obvious that Florida has not given priority to education, and that community colleges have fared most poorly of all.



Source: Division of Community Colleges

1987-88 to 1992-1993, Florida Community College appropriations have decreased steadily.

"Community colleges are ideally equipped to carry out this mission: they believe in the value of every individual; they celebrate the important victories –when men and women, who have slipped through the cracks of the system, gain the skills to be self-dependent; they are the only institutions prepared for the awesome task of helping the underprepared and disenfranchised to succeed."

Community colleges are a bargain.

Community colleges have been effectively serving their towns and cities by enabling citizens to become productive and independent. Why then, is financial support for community colleges decreasing to the point of major crisis?

The cost of education, when compared to the cost of maintaining persons in dependency is, as the old saying goes, cheap at twice the price. Community college expenditures in 1992-93 were $3,361.18 for the equivalent of each full time student. In 1992-93, Florida spent approximately $26,000 for each prisoner incarcerated in our prisons. When we think in wider terms, of the debilitation of our social health through rising crime and increased dependence on the system, it is clear that major changes must be made in our list of priorities. If post-secondary education carries such positive implications, does it not make sense to support the very colleges that have been engaged in this war against poverty since their inception?

The State of Florida is Starving the Solution.

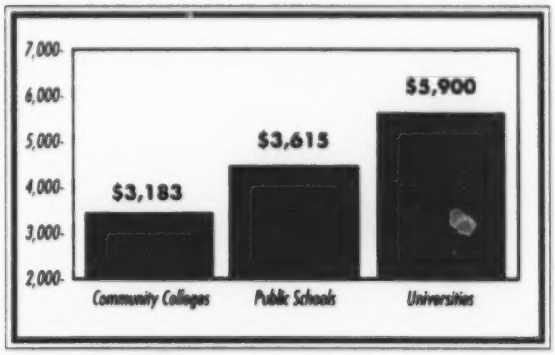
There are three salient points to consider: The growth of the underclass is destructive to the health of our society; in a world economy, America needs a quality workforce with high skills; the cost of maintaining an underclass in dependency is escalating and intolerable.

Community colleges can provide a way out of hopelessness, and a road to self-sufficiency. It would be far better to spend our resources on education than to permit people to fall into permanent dependency, to be supported for their lifetimes. Community colleges are essential to our economic future, they are productive, they are efficient—but—they are undervalued, underappreciated, and underfunded.

For many years, financial support for Florida's community colleges has been steadily declining. On top of gradually declining appropriations, colleges have been faced with major cuts in support over the past five years. At the same time, the cost of maintaining growing numbers of dependent individuals has been steadily increasing. As district president of Miami-Dade Community College, I have seen ample, incontrovertible evidence of our ability to assist men and women in moving from dependency to self-sufficiency through our educational programs. The lack of support has placed the community colleges on the very edge of losing the ability to successfully carry out their mission.

I am deeply concerned about the many issues that impact our society's well-being, but there is one underlying issue we tend to ignore—the expense of staying on the current path. If the

Florida Community College System Funding Per FTE (30 Credit Hours) by Delivery Systems 1994-1995



Source: Florida Department of Education

costs of crime and welfare programs continue to increase, and most predictions offer no indication otherwise, we will have to reduce funding for constructive assistance and the quality of life will continue to decline. I believe we could soon be saying the early '90s really were "the good old days."

"Florida is on the verge of irretrievably damaging the community colleges' capacity to be a constructive resource for the people of our state."

A Call to Action for the 1995 Florida Legislature

None of Florida's public educational institutions are well-funded, but the underfunding of community colleges has reached a critical circumstance. If the colleges were hospital patients, they would be in intensive care. The symptoms are ominous—a rapid increase in sections taught by part-time faculty; a decrease in support personnel; inadequate funds to stay current with technical equipment and library materials; and non-competitive salaries.

What has happened is the equivalent of starving a promising solution to the most serious problems facing our state. The passage of Proposition 2 severely restricts spending by the 1995 legislature. Nevertheless, it is imperative that the legislature give a priority to beginning the process of helping the recovery of the community colleges. Our state cannot afford the long-term cost of inaction—in lost human resources, a less-prepared work force, and increased costs to support more dependent individuals.

It is time to invest in Florida's future by reinvesting in Florida's Community Colleges.

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